

# breaking ground

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## Oris G. Bowen Breaks Employment Ground through State's Go-DBE Program



### also inside:

- *Gaining Skills for the Real World*
- *A Ninja Librarian's Quest*
- *Enabling Technology Meets Employment*
- *Employment and Community First Success Story*



Council on  
Developmental Disabilities



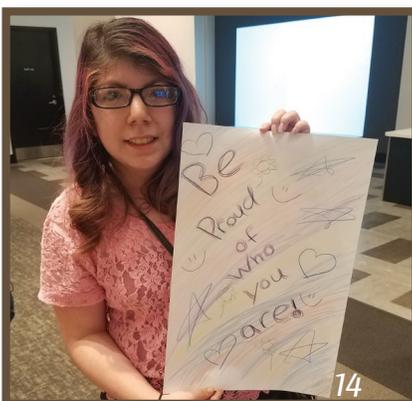
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# Introduction to Breaking Ground 94, Special Issue on Employment

by **Wanda Willis, Executive Director, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities**

Dear Readers:

This year the Council dedicates its annual employment issue of Breaking Ground magazine to Governor Bill Haslam. It has been five years since Governor Haslam signed Executive Order No. 28 establishing Tennessee as an “Employment First” state. Since that time, Tennessee has made unprecedented advances in improving and strengthening integrated and competitive employment for Tennesseans with disabilities.

In partnership with the Council and the IDEAL Program at Lipscomb University, the Governor’s Office hosted their first intern with an intellectual disability in 2017. In the past year, the TN Departments of Education, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, and Economic and Community Development have followed in their footsteps by hosting another six internships for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Council salutes Governor Haslam and his Cabinet for making employment for Tennesseans with disabilities a priority over the past eight years.

As Governor Haslam said in his last State of the State address, Tennessee still has work to do in coming years. The Council on Developmental Disabilities looks forward to continuing this important work throughout the next administration to ensure that all Tennesseans have an opportunity to thrive in competitive jobs of their choosing in their home community.

Join us in celebrating October as National Employment of People with Disabilities Month. In this issue of our amazing magazine, Breaking Ground, you’ll read articles about a new Project SEARCH internship site at Blue Cross Blue Shield in Chattanooga; young adults who receive support through the Employment and Community First CHOICES program to achieve their employment goals; how enabling technology can support people with disabilities at their jobs; the first business owner taking advantage of the expansion of the Governor’s Office of Diversity Business Enterprise (Go-DBE) to include businesses owned by entrepreneurs with disabilities; and several other employment-related stories.

As always, we love to hear from you, so let us know how you like this issue and how your community is working to address employment for Tennesseans with disabilities!



*Governor Haslam with members of the Employment First Task Force*

# Oris G. Bowen Breaks Employment Ground through State's Go-DBE Program

by **Ned Andrew Solomon, Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute Director, Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities**

TN Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute graduate Oris G. Bowen's entrepreneurial journey started in 1998, when he kickstarted a business – Full Force Transportation, Inc. - that he founded with several other partners. In 2000, he became the first minority participant in the state's Governor's Office Diversity of Business Enterprise ("Go-DBE") program, which promotes opportunities for businesses owned by minorities, women, and veterans who acquired disabilities in the service. He also received a certificate from President George H. W. Bush for being the first minority-owned business in the area of transportation in the state of Tennessee.

Full Force provided full-service, "on demand" transportation. Bowen's company became the first TennCare transportation provider owned by a minority business owner, and it also became a transportation vendor for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), enabling many VR clients to travel back and forth to work.

In 2004, Bowen's life changed dramatically, when he had an accident and lost his vision. "Because I lost my sight I had to shut the company down; I didn't have anybody who could run it for me," he recalled.

What followed was a very dark period for Bowen, sight-wise, and emotionally. He became extremely depressed and felt isolated from society.

In 2009 he began to re-emerge. One of the first things he did was visit the TN Disability Coalition to see if they could help. A Coalition staff member introduced Bowen to Metro Nashville's Access Ride program. "I also started taking technology courses, which led me to Vocational Rehabilitation," said Bowen.



Oris G. Bowen

At VR, Bowen worked on Orientation & Mobility training with Karen Nelson, the mother of TN Partners in Policymaking graduate, Dylan Brown. Karen encouraged Bowen to apply for the Council's Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute. "She said, 'you need to talk to Ned Solomon!'" laughed Bowen. "I applied and was accepted. When I came to Partners in Policymaking, it was my first time staying out, by myself, since becoming legally blind. Partners enlightened me. It inspired me to go on, and encouraged me to go back and talk to VR about getting more mobility and technology training."

Bowen did just that, and in 2013, VR sent him to live and work on his rehabilitation at the Louisiana Center for the Blind. "I had the experience of living in the Blind community, to be acclimated back to society," Bowen said.

After his stay in Louisiana, Bowen continued to access "skills training" with VR in Tennessee. The goal was to get Bowen back into the workforce. They soon realized that Bowen's experience with transportation would be far more valuable for his career than finding him an entry-level position somewhere, so they began trying to get him back to being a business owner. "I realized that it was time for me to go back into the transportation business," he said.

"I knew that my experience with transportation was well needed, to make sure that people had access to quality transportation. So I talked to my counselor, and she saw my vision."

In September 2017, Bowen was awarded funding from VR to go back into the transportation business. VR provided adaptive technology, marketing expenses, state and local business fees, office supplies and startup insurance. Bowen provided his own transporters and vehicles, and officially opened U Matter Transportation in February of 2018.

*Continued on page 8*

# Gaining Skills for the Real World

## by the BlueCross BlueShield of TN Project SEARCH Steering Committee

*In 2013, the Council on Developmental Disabilities funded and coordinated the expansion of Project SEARCH® internship sites across Tennessee. Now, this initiative is overseen by the Tennessee Department of Human Services - Vocational Rehabilitation, with partnership from the Departments of Education and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. This BlueCross BlueShield site marks the 10th Project SEARCH program hosting interns in TN.*

On August 8, 2018, eight students from Hamilton County schools joined the hustle and bustle of the workday at the Chattanooga campus of BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee as interns. These are no ordinary interns, though - they are the inaugural class of the newly established Project SEARCH program in Chattanooga.

Project SEARCH is designed to give young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities valuable work experience. Originally founded in 1996 by Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, the program has since been implemented in communities across the country and in several other countries around the world.

## Liftoff for Scenic City students

Establishing Project SEARCH in Chattanooga has long been a goal for the Hamilton County Department of Education (HCDE). A lack of specialized job-training resources means many young adult students with intellectual and developmental disabilities end up at home and unemployed after completing high school.

"These are students who are aging out of many of their supportive services," said Project SEARCH Liaison Jennifer Allison, who is also an Exceptional Education Lead Teacher for Secondary Programs in HCDE. "These individuals have demonstrated the capacity to learn and grow and contribute to the community, but there are few resources available to help them develop the kind of life and professional skills that would enable them to seek competitive employment."

In order for the program to operate in Chattanooga, a company had to be willing to take it on to serve as the host business for internships. The BlueCross involvement in Project SEARCH began when Stephani Ryan, Vice

President of BlueCare CHOICES - which provides home- and community-based supports to individuals with various disabilities - connected with HCDE Exceptional Education Supervisor Mitzi Delker and Project SEARCH's co-founder Susie Rutkowski at a conference.

"Our company's Employment and Community First (ECF) program within BlueCare CHOICES is all about helping people with disabilities participate in their community at the highest level possible," Stephani said. "Supporting Project SEARCH was a natural fit."

## Setting the stage for success

The Project SEARCH Steering Committee, comprised of representatives from BlueCross Human Resources department, HCDE, Siskin Hospital and Tennessee Department of Human Services - Vocational Rehabilitation Services (TDHS/VR), took on the task of developing and implementing Project SEARCH in BlueCross's Chattanooga office. The process, which began last fall, involved identifying a series of different jobs that students could rotate through during their internships, as well as determining how many internship slots would be available.

"These interns require more hands-on direction than the typical employee, and they have different skill sets," said Laura Hessler, Manager of Talent Acquisition in Human Resources. "We needed to make sure that we accounted for those things in determining which areas might be able to support an intern."

The Project SEARCH Steering Committee provided guidance to assist the BlueCross HR staff in developing opportunities that account for the different needs and strengths of Project SEARCH participants. "We wanted to help BlueCross develop an environment where these young people can flourish and advance their skill sets while providing a truly useful service to the company," said Tiffany Ramsey, Regional Supervisor with TDHS/VR.

In the early spring, prospective interns and their parents/guardians attended a series of meetings at BlueCross headquarters to learn more about the program. Vocational Rehabilitation and Siskin Hospital staff also worked with HCDE to prepare the students for internship opportunities.

*Continued on page 6*

## Skills ... *Continued from page 5*

“Our collective goal was to set everyone up for success,” said Wendy Evett, HCDE Instructor for Project SEARCH. “Proper preparation helps ensure that everyone has a good experience, and that the interns acquire skills that can be useful in gainful employment out in the community.”

A field of 13 candidates was whittled down to eight finalists after conducting interviews and skills assessments involving BlueCross employees and staff from HCDE, TDHS/VR and Siskin Hospital. “During the skills assessments, prospective interns performed a series of tasks such as moving materials, sorting mail, entering information from phone messages into a spreadsheet and constructing furniture,” said Siskin Hospital’s Community Re-entry Specialist Mark Heydt, who is the Lead Skills Trainer for Project SEARCH. “The students also answered questions about their interests and desire to work, which gave us an idea of their interpersonal communication abilities.”

## Heading to camp

The chosen eight participated in a week-long Camp Work Readiness program at Hixson High School in mid-June, which included training on a variety of practical and professional skills such as reading and following a bus schedule for transportation to and from work. The group also had the opportunity to talk through different workplace scenarios and practice their business communication skills, including eye contact and appropriate greetings.

At the end of the Camp, each intern participated in mock interviews with volunteers from BlueCross and other area businesses including Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) and Signal Centers, as well as HCDE administrators. “Getting to meet and talk with the students was a great honor,” said BlueCross HR Service Unit Manager Linda Atkins, who served as one of the mock interviewers. “It was wonderful to see how eager they are to learn and develop skills for gainful employment.”

## Gaining experience

The Project SEARCH interns, all of whom are in their last year of high school, are on the BlueCross campus

*University of Tennessee  
Ag Extension staff June  
Puett teaches Camp Work  
Readiness participants,  
Marlon Kennemore and  
Martin Boatwright, how to  
prepare a nutritious meal.*



from 8 am to 3 pm every day, and follow the schedule of the school year. The group begins their workdays in a classroom, discussing plans for each day and working through a Project SEARCH® curriculum that includes lessons on how to get and keep a job, health and wellness, technology, self-advocacy and more.

After a two-week orientation and training period in August, interns embarked on the first of their three consecutive 10-week internships in the company. They rotate through roles in different divisions, from clerical work with BlueCare Tennessee and the Member Benefits Administration, to facilities support with Properties and Administrative Services and custodial roles with Environmental Services.

“Each department involved in this initiative provides a mentor, someone the intern can go to with questions and rely on for support,” said Project SEARCH’s Susie Rutkowski. “A Project SEARCH instructor or skills trainer works with each intern to learn new tasks in the various areas as the internship progresses.”

By the end of the program in May 2019, each participant will have developed a robust set of skills and experience to add to their résumé, which will hopefully help them secure a paying job in the community after their time with Project SEARCH.

“This is an opportunity for these interns to get a job and go on with their lives, just like their counterparts in high school are doing,” Susie said.

Parents of Chattanooga’s new Project SEARCH students are optimistic about the impact the program will have on their children. “My son wants to move forward,” said Angela McReynolds, mother of Project SEARCH intern D’Angelo McReynolds. “He wants to go out in the world and get a job and a paycheck. This program gives him hope for the future to not be looked at differently because of his disability.”

# Kathleen Lehigh: A Ninja librarian's quest for a career

by Patti Lehigh, TN Partners in Policymaking™ Leadership Institute graduate and Kathleen's mom

Kathleen Lehigh of Cordova, Tennessee has the super powers of cerebral palsy and dyslexia. She graduated from Concord Academy High School in Memphis. Her goal was always to be a librarian (secretly a Ninja Librarian), and she knew that her main objective was to get a Library and Information Science (LIS) Degree from the University of Southern Mississippi (USM).

Kathleen completed her basic classes at a community college in Memphis. At the same time she interned as a librarian at the Catholic Diocese of Memphis Library and competed for the Mid-South Adaptive Sports and Recreation Group to represent Tennessee at regional levels in track and field.

Kathleen started her core undergraduate classes online with USM's LIS Department. At the same time she worked internships for the Memphis Public Library and Information Center (MPLIC) in the Archive Department and then at the Help Desk. For Kathleen's last year of undergraduate school she moved to the USM campus in Hattiesburg, MS.

The whole time she never wavered from her mission – just like a Ninja!

Kathleen used her walker and her scooter for access around campus. She interviewed and hired a Personal Care Assistant (PCA). She made friends and introduced people to her different abilities.

The campus police provided her rides to class during rainstorms so she wouldn't ruin her scooter. She involved her instructors and friends in meeting her accommodation needs. The Office of Disabilities and Accommodations and the Office of Housing and Residency at USM were phenomenal in their service. Kathleen realized she was responsible for asking for help and being specific

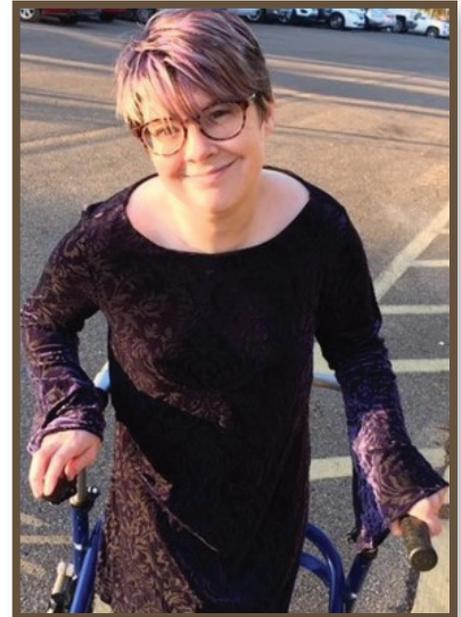
about what was needed – if she was going to succeed.

She completed her BA in Library and Information Science with Highest Honors in Fall 2014, and after consulting with interested representatives of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, she knew, in order to reach her dreams, she had to work a bit more. Kathleen started the Master's program Spring 2015.

Kathleen learned that balance is key. She worked her life around church, school, exercise and her mental health. Kathleen knows that when she is so busy with life and her "super powers," asking for help with anxiety and depression is one of the most important things to do! She utilized the campus fitness center because exercise also helped her mental health. She developed a routine including yoga, modified ballet and working with a personal trainer.

Kathleen completed her Master's Degree in Library and Information Science and a Certificate in Special Collections and Archives in May 2018.

Kathleen is actively seeking a position that matches her skills, her interests and her Ninja attitude. She is also trying to complete a yoga teaching certificate, as a back-up plan or to supplement her library work. She wishes to remain in the South, but if the FBI needs her, she might see what she can do to accommodate them!



*Kathleen Lehigh, YLF grad, daughter of Partners grad, Patti*



# Where Enabling Technology Meets Employment

by **Jeremy Norden-Paul, State Director of Employment and Day Services, Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

On a typical Monday morning, a young woman - let's call her Christine - packs her lunch, grabs her cell phone and keys, and locks the front door. She leaves home and begins the seven-block walk to the bus stop. Along the way, Christine checks a GPS-enabled app on her phone to make sure she is heading in the right direction. She arrives at the bus stop and checks the time on her phone - still plenty of time to get to work before her shift starts. A bus appears on the horizon and Christine reads the number on the front: 55. She reopens the phone app to double-check her bus number: 33. Not this one. Bus 55 slows to a stop, lets off a few passengers, and continues on its way. After another few minutes, bus 33 stops and opens its doors. Christine climbs aboard, scans her bus pass, finds an open seat, and settles in for the 20-minute ride to work.

Every few minutes, Christine checks her phone app to make sure she doesn't accidentally get off at the wrong stop. She knows the app will alert her when it's time to exit the bus. As her bus stop nears, Christine's app sends her a notification, reminding her to pull the cord to alert the driver. She hops off the bus, double checks her app to

make sure she is at the right place, then turns left to walk another three minutes and finish the last leg of her commute.

As Christine walks through the front door and heads to the breakroom to clock in, her app sends another notification that she has arrived at work and gives her the option of viewing her job checklist and a series of photos and video clips. The app is customized specifically for Christine and her job; she can view a photo checklist of the tasks she needs to complete for the day. When she clicks on each photo, she has the option of reading a description of the task or watching a short video clip of herself actually performing the task. Later, after she completes each task, Christine uses her phone app to mark each of them "complete" and remind herself of what comes next. The app also sends her notifications at the start and end times of her breaks. Since Christine has been at her job about a year now, she doesn't always need all of the functions the app offers, but she appreciates having the extra support.

It's time to get started, so first Christine heads to her cubicle, turns on the computer, logs in and checks her email. Then, she looks for any written messages her manager may have left on her desk. After that, Christine thumbs through the invoices stacked in her "in" basket

## Go-DBE ... *Continued from page 4*

Shortly afterwards, Bowen re-applied to the Go-DBE program, which in July 2017 had added a "business owner with disability" category to its eligibility list. Bowen became the first entrepreneur with a disability - other than veterans with disabilities, who had been included in another eligibility category since the beginning - to be approved.

"This is important for all of us in the disability community to realize that we can go forth, and be acknowledged for our abilities, not our disabilities," he said.

Bowen would like to see U Matter move beyond what he was able to accomplish with his first transportation company model. U Matter will provide door-to-door service, wherever a client wants to go, in Nashville or throughout the state. He also wants families to know

that they can trust their family members and their kids to be safe in U Matter vehicles. In addition, Bowen ensures that all of his drivers are trained on supporting riders with disabilities. As his business expands, he plans on hiring people with disabilities to fill various positions with the company.

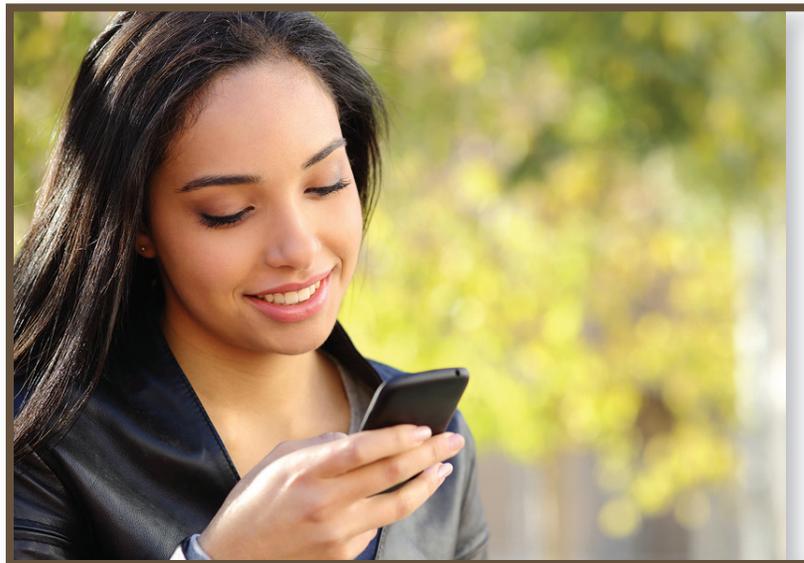
He has another long-term goal. "There are so many people in the disability community who want to work, but they don't have any way to pay for their transportation," Bowen explained. "I'm trying to find some funding that will enable us to provide transportation for those who can't afford it. I am committed to working with people in the disability community because so many people don't understand: it's not your disability; it's your ability."

*For more information about U Matter, visit [umattertransportation.com](http://umattertransportation.com) or call 615.600.1217.*

and heads over to the scanner to start uploading them to her cloud for processing. When it's time for her break, she chats a bit with coworkers, checks the time again, checks in with her manager, and gets back to work. Six hours fly by and Christine is done for the day. She makes sure all of her duties have been marked "complete" in her app, says goodbye to those still in the office, and heads to the door to begin the journey back home.

This is just one ordinary day in the life of Christine, who has an intellectual disability and has a job in the community. But what is extraordinary is that just last year she depended on a job coach to transport her to work, help her get set up at her work station, and keep her on track with her duties throughout the day. There was hardly a moment when Christine's job coach was not within arm's reach or somewhere else nearby. Now, Christine's job coach only checks in with her once per week by phone, or whenever Christine feels she needs a bit of extra support. Looking back, Christine has experienced a pretty significant and empowering transformation from last year until now.

One of the main reasons for her increased independence and job satisfaction is the app she installed on her phone last year. Often referred to as "mobile enabling technology", this app was exactly the tool Christine needed to feel more confident about taking public transportation to work and accomplishing her duties without needing a job coach physically by her side. There are several varieties of mobile enabling technology, most of which can be customized to meet the needs of the user. Some are equipped with GPS capabilities and some use video modeling to help users learn and practice their job duties. Some even allow a user to share their content with other people, including family members or a job coach. Despite variations between different apps and software platforms, all mobile enabling technologies have the same goal: to empower people to be more independent at work and in the community.



Last year, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) launched the Enabling Technology initiative, with the goal of helping people achieve higher levels of independence and a greater quality of life. Through the Enabling Technology initiative, selected DIDD providers are given funds to invest in various forms of technology for the people they support, for use both at home and in the community. Technologies range from stove sensors and doorbell cameras at home, to GPS-enabled and video-based smartphone apps at work. The sky is the limit and each person chooses technologies that support his or her own needs and interests. It is a totally customized and person-centered process.

Mobile enabling technologies are an especially critical tool for DIDD to achieve its goal of doubling its competitive integrated employment (CIE) rate by 2022. There are many folks supported by DIDD who are not currently working, and also many who are already employed, who could take advantage of mobile enabling technologies to increase their independence, productivity and quality of life.

Technology is truly everywhere in 2018; having a disability should not exclude someone from reaping its full benefits. Just like Christine, people across Tennessee are beginning to experience the power of technology at work. DIDD is hoping many more will have the same opportunity in the years to come.

*For more information about how DIDD is using mobile technologies to help people become more independent at work and in the community, please contact Jeremy Norden-Paul, state director of employment and day services, at [jeremy.norden-paul@tn.gov](mailto:jeremy.norden-paul@tn.gov).*

# Student with Autism Achieves Success through Social Skills Training

by Karen A. Davis and Lori Williamson, Tennessee  
Department of Human Services/Tennessee Rehabilitation  
Center - Smyrna

Stuart Drobina may be a man of few words, but his actions say it all.

"I know he likes his job because he gets ready two hours prior," said Jeffrey Drobina, Stuart's father, with a chuckle.

In fact, the 25-year-old, who was diagnosed with autism at three, once showed up to work on a holiday – and it quickly became a day to remember. "They forgot to tell him the place was closed, and he went to work and set the alarm off," said Jeffrey, sharing one example of how dedicated Stuart is to his job.

Stuart says his is a "busy job" that keeps him moving throughout his shift as a custodian at Dickson Medical Associates. He is employed there through Janarus – The Good Janitors. "I take out the trash and do vacuuming," said Stuart.

It's a little more complicated than that, according to Tom Benoit, Operations Manager with Janarus. Benoit, who interviewed and hired Stuart in 2016, said Stuart had to receive special training in handling medical waste as part of his job at the medical facility in Dickson. "We've never had any issues with him," said Benoit. "He's always on time, dependable, an excellent worker. He knows his routine.

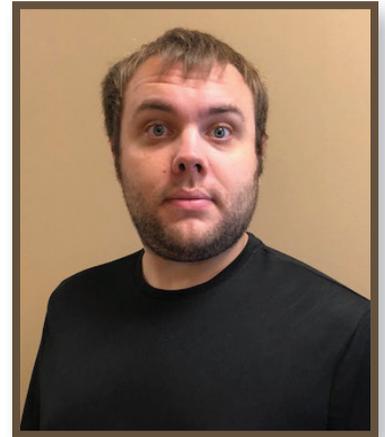
"I think people with disabilities who are being trained by the state are a great asset to our company," continued Benoit. "They know how to do the job and do it correctly."

Stuart said he doesn't think he would have been very successful at finding his job had he not first completed the Commercial Cleaning vocational training program at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center in Smyrna (TRC-Smyrna). He said the things he learned there helped him get and keep the job he has held for nearly two years since graduating from TRC-Smyrna in December 2016. "I'm a fast learner," Stuart said. "They showed me what to do and how to do it."

When he first entered TRC-Smyrna, Stuart struggled with limited verbal communication skills. However, he worked

to strengthen those, as well as his social skills, by attending the Social Skills Training Group for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) twice weekly. The group is led by Speech-Language Pathologists. It helped Stuart learn to better engage in everyday social situations that most people take for granted.

Jeffrey added that TRC-Smyrna also helped his son on the path to employment by helping him line up the interview and by accompanying him to it.



Stuart Drobina

When asked what he likes best about his job, Stuart said, "The location. The hours. And the coworkers are all right."

Stuart's father believes his son is now more independent. "He's only asked me to take him to work a couple times, and that was during bad weather," said Jeffrey. "He buys stuff for himself that he wants, within reason, and he buys all the groceries."

Social skills can be among the biggest challenges for students on the autism spectrum like Stuart, when it comes to seeking and entering into employment. It can be a barrier to employment when the individual feels pressured to change and assimilate into a new workplace culture.

In response to an increase in referrals of individuals with ASD, TRC-Smyrna began offering a variety of individualized support services to students with ASD four years ago. About 27% of the students enrolled at TRC-Smyrna are on the spectrum. An ASD Coordinator now oversees the service offerings for these students to help ensure each gets what he or she needs to best succeed in their journey toward employment. The coordinator assists with tracking trends and adding individualized services and accommodations as recommended by the team of staff and therapists working with the students.



Among the services these students receive are pre-admission case reviews to prepare for their arrival; ASD individual and group sessions; observational assessments; discharge planning; social skills training; social-emotional groups; psychology, speech-language and behavioral supports; and an ASD tracking team. That team is an interdisciplinary group of staff, led by the ASD Coordinator, who meet monthly to discuss any issues students with ASD may be having or accommodations these students may need, and track recommendations with the student and/or staff as needed.

In addition, school-aged youth on the spectrum may receive assistance through the center's range of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This includes the TRC-Smyrna Workplace Social Skills Training Boot Camp for individuals with ASD, which seeks to address social and other challenges individuals on the spectrum may have in a way that helps these students break down barriers to employment. Now in its third year, the Boot Camp's goal is to help the individual maintain his or her uniqueness while learning the communication skills needed to navigate the workplace. The best part is students are empowered to capitalize on their strengths.

The Boot Camp serves youth between the ages of 14 and 22 with a documented disability who are receiving educational services. Each Boot Camp is targeted toward meeting the needs of the individual and the group, with a focus on future goals. While some students are ready to enter the workforce and may benefit from focusing on prepping for interaction with employers, others may first need counseling on post-secondary options. All can

typically benefit from job exploration and advocacy skills geared toward the specific questions and concerns of those on the spectrum.

A major emphasis of the Boot Camp is giving students the opportunity to practice social skills in a safe and accepting environment. Many Boot Camp participants have shared that the camp gave them the chance to ask the questions they have often wondered about, but had never felt comfortable saying out loud. Participants can expect both learning and sharing with others about their interests, as well as practice using social memories to make connections in conversation. Games and interactive activities give participants the chance to openly ask questions to gain an understanding of how many neuro-typical individuals may respond or react.

Additional individual and Boot Camp opportunities may be offered throughout the rest of 2018. Additional training opportunities will be announced soon for summer 2019. For more information, contact Ginger Day, ASD Coordinator, at 615-223-8049 or [ginger.day@tn.gov](mailto:ginger.day@tn.gov).

*TRC-Smyrna is one of only eight state-operated comprehensive rehabilitation facilities in the nation. It is operated by the Tennessee Department of Human Services, Division of Rehabilitation Services. TRC-Smyrna assists individuals with disabilities in achieving their vocational goals through comprehensive vocational evaluations; vocational training programs; vision impairment services; employment readiness services; and traumatic brain injury services.*

*Karen A. Davis is the Supervisor of Vision Impairment Services at TRC-Smyrna. Lori Williamson is the TRC Behavior Coordinator. Janet Morris, TRC Special Programs Administrator, and Ginger Day, TRC ASD Coordinator, also contributed to this article.*

# Tyler Bates: An “Employment and Community First” success story

by Jonathan Lawrence, ECF CHOICES Support Coordinator, BlueCare Tennessee

When he enrolled in the Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES program in 2016, Tyler Bates received support to find his first job at Buffalo Wild Wings rolling silverware. After two successful years, he lost his job due to restructuring. Tyler and his mother were unsure what to do next, so his ECF CHOICES Support Coordinator, Jonathan Lawrence, and Tyler’s personal assistant (funded through ECF to support Tyler achieve his goals and live more independently), James Noar, discussed options with the family. “Discovery”, an ECF service which helps members identify their interests and skills related to employment, was suggested as a starting point.

After considering different types of jobs, Tyler decided that he wanted to work in the food industry as a prep cook. When Tyler began learning new cooking skills, his original goal was to help his mom fix dinner. Because Tyler’s first reaction when asked to try new things had typically been, “maybe next year”, James’ plan was to teach Tyler cooking in a fun way so he wouldn’t think of it as “working on something new”. James approached it as if he was teaching a good friend how to cook, and relied on Tyler’s love of the computer to show him how to find recipes and cooking videos.

Soon Tyler began finding new recipes on his own, and so James began teaching him how to shop for the necessary ingredients. A little uneasy at first, Tyler quickly mastered the skill of grocery shopping, and James helped him prepare dinner for his family on Friday evenings. Tyler’s mother, Paige, said, “[James] saw Tyler’s potential even when I had my doubts and concerns about [Tyler] working in a kitchen environment.”

James worked with Tyler regularly on tasks that would help him get a job in a kitchen; from making dough to portioning items, frying different foods, washing dishes, making a pizza, etc. With support from James, Tyler also learned how to create a menu, take inventory of his pantry, make a grocery list and pay for the groceries.



Tyler Bates

Tyler went for a “hands-on” interview at Pizza Hut in Clarksville and, although the tasks at Pizza Hut were slightly different from the ones he had practiced at home, they were still similar enough. When Tyler tried out the job, James could easily give him some simple directions, and Tyler picked things up quickly. “James made sure that the manager knew what to expect from Tyler, and they were able to carve out a position that matched [Tyler’s] skills,” explained Paige.

That experience turned into a successful interview and Tyler landed the job. He has been working at Pizza Hut since January 2018 and currently works 15-20 hours each week. Paige asked Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to provide job coaching support for a month or two. VR did just that, and was able to phase out after only four shifts of coaching Tyler on the job.

Pizza Hut staff and the manager now provide any training Tyler needs. His manager created visual “cheat sheets” for Tyler that can be followed to complete any of the required tasks.

Tyler enjoys working and feels it gives him a sense of purpose. He likes the extra money to pay for things he wants. “I know how to do my job good because it is easy,” Tyler said.

Tyler’s skills continue to grow, and he has taken on more responsibilities at Pizza Hut. Tyler will now actively look for things to do at work to keep him busy, even if they’re new tasks he needs to learn – replacing the whole “maybe next year” reluctance. “His first tasks included preparing the pizza sauce cups, making garlic bread knots and washing dishes,” reported Paige. “James and his staff made sure Tyler had great natural support there from coworkers and his manager and were able to fade out the job coaching services after only a month. Since then they have added new duties, including portioning chicken wings and folding pizza boxes.”



Tyler Bates with job developer, James Noar

Management at Pizza Hut is very pleased with Tyler and appreciates his company. With support from his ECF CHOICES staff, Tyler was able to learn skills at home and become very comfortable with those skills, which worked to his advantage and resulted in a job that he enjoys. As a result, Tyler has discovered he can do much more than roll silverware; he can be a prep person at Pizza Hut, which promises him significant growth potential for the future.

## Remembering Dr. Thomas Cheetham

The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities mourns the loss of Dr. Thomas Cheetham, Deputy Commissioner of Health Services for the TN Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, who passed away in August 2018 at the age of 73.

Dr. Cheetham dedicated his life to serving people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and was a tireless advocate for improving healthcare for individuals with disabilities. His contributions to this field not only benefited people in Tennessee, but also people around the world through his work on Health Care for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Toolkit for Primary Care Providers (“IDD Toolkit”)\*. In 2017, he was awarded the inaugural Surgeon General’s Spirit Award for Outstanding Leadership and Service by the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry.

“Dr. Cheetham was a leader and critical partner in the Council’s efforts to improve access to quality healthcare for Tennesseans with developmental disabilities,” said

Wanda Willis, Executive Director of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. “Tom’s expertise about health disparities and barriers facing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in accessing appropriate primary care was invaluable. He will be deeply missed, not only in by those who worked with him here in Tennessee but throughout the U.S.”



\*Explore the IDD Toolkit: <https://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/etoolkit/>. The Developmental Disabilities Health Care E-Toolkit is a project of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development, the University of Tennessee Boling Center for Developmental Disabilities and the Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and is funded by the WITH (Working for Inclusive and Transformative Healthcare) Foundation, formerly the Special Hope Foundation. Dr. Cheetham was a primary contributor to this toolkit and member of its Advisory Committee.

# Council and Empower TN Collaborate on Youth Leadership Academy 2018

by **Ned Andrew Solomon, Editor-in-Chief, Breaking Ground**

This past June, 10 youth with disabilities were selected to participate in the 2018 Youth Leadership Academy. The two-day training was facilitated by staff from the Council and Empower TN, Middle Tennessee's Center for Independent Living.

This was a great opportunity for youth to learn some skills, or build on the ones they already had. They attended sessions on self-advocacy (Finding My Empowered Voice); life after high school (My Life, My Choice); problem-solving (Wait – I Know How To Do That!); independent living (You Have Rights) disability pride (I Am Who I Am) and assistive technology. Several of these were not your typical PowerPoint presentations, but informal “conversations” where the youth participants and the adult mentors shared the challenges and successes in different aspects of their lives.

The event took place in two locations: Second Presbyterian Church on Wednesday and the Frist Art Museum on Thursday. Near the end of the second day, youth were “let loose” to explore the Frist’s numerous art exhibits and experiences, which made for lots of fun and some fantastic photos!

We want to congratulate the following youth leaders for taking part in this learning and networking experience:

**Tradell Brockman, Murfreesboro**

**Sarah Carson, Hendersonville**

**Tom Curl, Franklin**

**Isabella Forrester-Kent, Nashville**

**Fernina Lopez, Clarksville**

**Gillian Lynette, Brentwood**

**Sean Mevis, Kingston Springs**

**Joshua Riley, Brentwood**

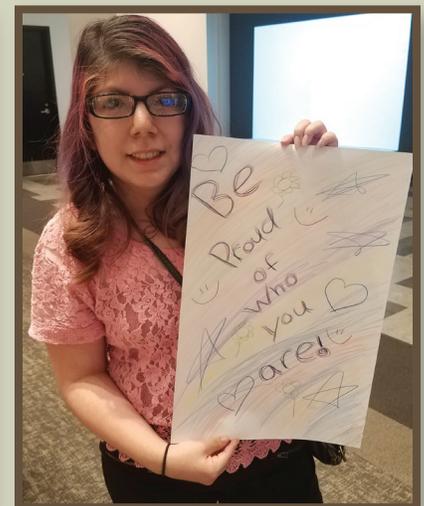
**Kaitlyn “Lexi” Shelnett, Decherd**

**Jaydon Sullenger, Tullahoma**

Here’s the really good news: both the Council and Empower TN are on board to host the second Youth Leadership Academy in Middle Tennessee in summer 2019, which will be the third Academy after the initial program was held in Paris in 2016 in partnership with T.A.R.P. For more information, please contact me, Ned Andrew Solomon, at 615.532.6556 or ned.solomon@tn.gov.



*Brandon leads discussion on disability pride*



*Fernina is Proud!*



Tradell Brockman



YLA in the Land of Colors



Paul Choquette



Sarah, Gillian and Isabella



Tradell and Josh Build a Tower!



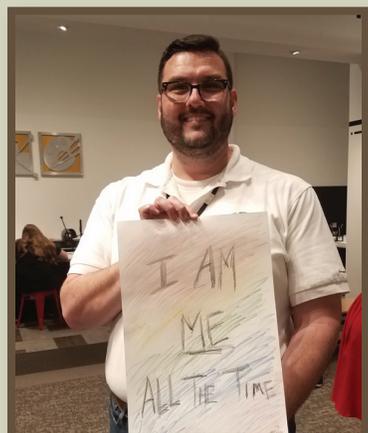
Lexi in the Art Zone!



Marissa Smith-Fletcher



Sheri and Evan teaching AT



YLA Brandon's Mission Statement



Brandon group



Kayla Meredith, volunteer

# New Council Staff Member Ashley Edwards

On July 16, Ashley Edwards joined the staff of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities as executive assistant to the Council's executive director, Wanda Willis.

Ashley has previously worked in the education field, most recently as a math teacher at Nashville Classical Charter School. She served as program manager for a model science, technology, engineering and math program for the Nashville After Zone Alliance, a project that began in the Nashville Mayor's office. She has also worked as a content editor and writer for Common Sense Media, a national organization that rates and reviews digital media for kids and families.

A significant segment of her career in education was focused on working with students with IEPs (individualized education plans) and Section 504 plans. Working with students with disabilities became a passion for her. She



Ashley Edwards

has a BS degree in American history and a MEd in reading education. Ashley's family includes her husband, Korey, who works in the Office of Criminal Justice Programs, and their two children, Lucas (9) and Amelia (5).

"I'm excited to support the Council's work across the state," said Ashley. "I've spent the majority of my career working with youth and families in Middle Tennessee and look forward to broadening my lens beyond the school building. I'm looking forward to meeting everyone, learning from the Council and its partners, and providing support to the Council's initiatives and programs."

JoEllen Fowler, administrative assistant for the Council who supported Wanda for the past 15 years, has transitioned into a new role overseeing several administrative processes and responsibilities related to the Council becoming an independent, stand-alone agency in state government in July 2016.

"We are incredibly fortunate to have JoEllen and Ashley on the Council team," said Wanda Willis. "Both are extremely skilled and dedicated to the work that the Council does."

# New Council Member Alicia Hall

In June, Governor Haslam appointed Alicia Hall of Cordova, Tennessee to represent the Memphis Delta Development District on the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. Alicia is the wife of Gino, Sr. and the mother of Gino, II (14 years old) and Gabrielle (10 years old). She is the founder and chief executive officer of "Maximum Abilities" (formerly the GLH Retinoschisis Foundation & support group). She works as an ESL (English as a Second Language) tutor with Shelby County Schools and as the director of finance at Evangel Church in Memphis. She graduated from Southwest Tennessee Community College with an associate's degree of applied sciences in business management.

Alicia is also a 2016-17 graduate of the Council's Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute and has a son with vision loss. She currently serves on the West Tennessee Family Support Council as a Shelby County School System Parent Ambassador and formerly served as the

family chair and co-chair of the Foundation Fighting Blindness - Memphis Vision Walk.

Alicia shared, "I can honestly say that if God didn't allow me to have to face the vision impairment of my son, Gino, II, who is currently 14 years old but was 14 months old at the time of being diagnosed with Juvenile X-Linked Retinoschisis, I might not have the drive I do today to be a strong advocate for those with disabilities. It is an honor to serve on the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities because I have a passion and a purpose to be the voice for those who are not given the chance to use their own voice."



Alicia Hall

# Council Selects 2018-19 Partners in Policymaking™ Class

The Council is proud to announce the selected individuals who will be participating in the 2018-19 Partners in Policymaking Leadership Institute Class. Partners is a free leadership and advocacy training program for adults with disabilities and family members of people with disabilities. Attendees are trained by local and national experts in a wide range of disability-related topics, including building inclusive communities and classrooms, competitive and supported employment, supported and independent living, the state and federal legislative processes, assistive technology and much more. An annual Partners Reunion Conference brings together Partners from the current class and graduates who have participated in the program since 1993.

The 2018-19 program began the weekend of September 7 & 8, and will continue through graduation on April 13, 2019. The Council endeavors with each new class to create a superior learning environment that has geographically-, culturally- and ethnically-diverse participants, with as equal a mix as possible of adults with disabilities and family members.

## The 2018-19 Partners Class is:

- Henry Adams**, Brentwood
- Patrick Adams**, Madison
- Alison Bynum**, Smyrna
- Natalie Campbell**, Knoxville
- Jackie Cullom**, Nashville
- Jessica Gant**, Jackson
- Annette Graves**, Jackson
- Stephanie Jackson**, Nashville
- Gene La'Master, Jr.**, Memphis
- Lacey Lyons**, Whites Creek
- Justin McBride**, Memphis
- Rosaline Mills**, Nashville
- Gabriela Mjekiqi**, Knoxville
- Donna Nasso**, Germantown
- Allen Nesmith**, Chattanooga
- Brittany Norrod**, Maryville
- Natalie Nunley**, Tracy City
- Stephanie Phillips**, Jackson
- Patricia Powell**, Antioch
- Bonnie Radtke**, Munford
- Yesenia Ramos**, Clarksville
- Joshua Riley**, Brentwood
- Ernie Roark**, Oak Ridge
- Jason Rogers**, Chattanooga
- Becky Scott**, Murfreesboro
- Birtha Street**, Nashville
- Karen Vest**, Tullahoma



For more information about the Partners training, or for an application for the 2019-20 Class, please visit our website at [www.tn.gov/cdd/](http://www.tn.gov/cdd/) or contact Partners Director Ned Andrew Solomon at 615.532.6556 or [ned.solomon@tn.gov](mailto:ned.solomon@tn.gov).



# Teaching the Next Generation of Leaders about Caring

by Ned Andrew Solomon, Editor-in-Chief, Breaking Ground

Advocates in the disability community – be they individuals with disabilities, family members of people with disabilities, or those who work with or for people with disabilities, or those who simply want to improve the lives of their fellow citizens with disabilities – have been saying for years that meaningful community integration is the way to get people to care. It is why so many of us applaud inclusive preschools and grade schools, because we know that the earlier young kids are learning and creating and playing and eating lunch next to kids with disabilities, the more they will see them, naturally, as their peers, neighbors, friends, college buddies, co-workers or bosses.

As a society, by and large, we are benefiting from a new generation of young adults who embrace diversity, in all its forms. They have come to believe that every person has a unique set of skills and challenges, and something valuable to contribute. Is it any coincidence that these same young people shared classrooms with students with disabilities during their formative years?

I did not. I was not aware of people with disabilities until I was hired at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center to work as a managing editor on a peer-reviewed journal, and had a colleague who used a power wheelchair. I wasn't even sure what I had seen when this buzzing blur moved down the hallway outside my office on my very first day of work.

That colleague would become my daughter's godmother.

As fate would have it, I would wind up having three children with disabilities. That was my education. And it was way too long in coming.

I am blessed to have worked for the Council on Developmental Disabilities since December of 2000. That colleague I mentioned before? She was the Chair of the

Council for several years; she was the one who told me I should consider taking this job. And through this job I have had the wonderful good fortune to give presentations for lots and lots of people across the state of Tennessee. My co-workers and I have talked to various audiences about many topics, including the importance of self-advocacy; giving support that truly supports people without taking away their ability to be in control of their own lives; the need to consider supported decision-making; and perhaps more than any other topic, disability sensitivity and awareness.

The Council has taught this important topic to teachers and administrators and hotel staff and case managers and service providers and caregivers and business owners who want to diversify their workforce. But some of our most exciting

opportunities recently have been presenting this topic for young audiences who are on the cusp of adulthood, who are either on a career track now that will lead them to encounter patients or clients with disabilities, or are studying to discover who and what it is they want to be.

We need these young people to have open hearts and minds about their fellow citizens with disabilities. We need them to understand how to communicate effectively and interact respectfully with community members who have disabilities, and to understand the barriers people with disabilities and their families still face in creating meaningful, inclusive and rewarding lives in their communities. We need these young people to become the compassionate leaders of tomorrow, to drive the change for a more welcoming and inclusive world. We need these young people to seek out caring professions.

We need these young people to care.

*For information about scheduling a free presentation from the Council, contact Communications Director Emma Shouse Garton at [emma.shouse@tn.gov](mailto:emma.shouse@tn.gov) or 615.253.5368.*



*Ned Andrew meets with physician assistant students at Bethel University in Paris, TN*



## BG Arts 2018-19 Issue Invitation to Submit

***Do you write short stories, creative essays or poetry?***

***Do you paint, sculpt, draw or take photographs?***

**If so, we'd love to see your work for possible publication.**

*Breaking Ground* magazine invites you to contribute to our Annual Arts Issue for 2018-19. We will consider fiction, creative essays and poetry up to 1,000 words, photos and all other forms of artwork.

**Content is devoted to work by or about persons with disabilities.**

We will give published contributors a prominent by-line, a biographical note and copies of the printed magazine. Please include your full name, complete contact information, and a one-to two-sentence bio with your submission.

**All submissions are due by November 15.**

Please limit submissions to three (3) per person.

Send your submissions, electronically, to: Ned Andrew Solomon at [ned.solomon@tn.gov](mailto:ned.solomon@tn.gov)

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